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METAL MUSEUM

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CORRECTION
In Findings (*Metalsmith* issue 41.2) the text for the *Cernunnos* portrait by Blood & Dust (Hayley Evans and Lizbeth Poirier) contained a pronoun error. The correct pronouns for the portrait subject are they/them. The *Metalsmith* staff regrets the error.

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Artists. Designers. Jewelers. Metalsmiths. The Society of North American Goldsmiths advances jewelry and metalsmithing by inspiring creativity, encouraging education, and fostering community.
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"I want to be a neuron. I don't want to be the brain. We're all the brain. We're all…part of the same body."

I first heard this statement nearly a decade ago by free-form radio pioneer Bob Fass on his show *Radio Unnameable*—which aired on WBAI New York for more than fifty years—but it has been rolling around in my mind ever since. I thought of it again while mulling over the throughlines of this issue of *Metalsmith*: the synapse-like network of making and makers, and the intricacies and intimacies that finely link us to one another.

Whether we realize it or not, we are all "part of the same body" of this field. It might be two artists working in wildly different scales who both draw upon Victorian-era hairwork and mourning jewelry, such as Angela Hennessy as profiled by Rebekah Frank, or Melanie Bilenker by Andrea DiNoto. Or the makers whose paths crossed in fortuitous ways that are still rippling outward years later, as in the article "Explorations in Black Jewelry: Community." In "Findings," Jackie Andrews spotlights the recently launched curatorial platform *Crucible*, as well as some exciting projects calling for support or participation from the broader community. Matthew K. Limb puts the new catalog *Objects USA: 2020* into context with the history it honors and what it captures of our present.

Curated by *Metalsmith's* Editorial Assistant Olivia Shih, "LOOK" questions how the pandemic has changed our sense of intimacy through works that embrace the poetics of revealing and concealing. Blacksmith Ellen Durkan, profiled by Marjorie Simon, juxtaposes the hardness of iron with the softness of flesh in sculptural scaffolding that defies the material and exalts the body. Scholar and metalsmith Ana M. Lopez offers an exploration of Monel, a material whose unique properties appeal to makers working in scales ranging from monumental to intimate.

"RINGS!" is a visual essay highlighting Helen Drutt's recent exhibition of the same name. We learn how a collection unfolds, as not just a pattern of procurement but in communion with makers, an act of reverence for the vast potential of expression within the limits of a single form.

Like Bob Fass, I too want to be a neuron. Please, fellow neurons, share your synaptic responses with me: editor@snagmetalsmith.org.

—Adriane Dalton, Editor

The mission of *Metalsmith* is to explore, analyze, promote, and document excellence and innovation in the field of jewelry and metalsmithing. In achieving this goal, SNAG will produce and oversee the direction and content of a publication that will serve as a significant resource for the metalsmithing field. The editorial content of *Metalsmith* will emphasize contemporary activities, makers, and ideas and incorporate supportive content, relevant critical issues, and the exchange of viewpoints.

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Liv Blåvarp
Black Beauty 4/4, 2019
Necklace
Palisander, lemon wood, ebony, whale tooth, common box, brass discs and polyester cords
11 in DIA (28 cm DIA)
Photo: Per-Erik Beck Bjornback
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Image: Fowler Studio, 1906, Evanston, Illinois

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Clara Barck Welles, Inspiration & Influence in Arts & Crafts Silver

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The Society of North American Goldsmiths is an international nonprofit organization that serves as the primary organization of jewelers and metal artists in North America. Anyone interested in the related fields may become a member. Members include independent studio artists, teachers, students, gallerists, collectors, curators, and writers.

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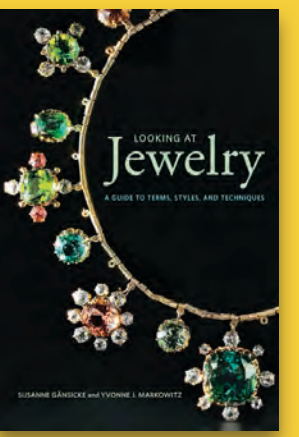

Looking at Jewelry
A Guide to Terms, Styles, and Techniques

Susanne Gänsicke and Yvonne J. Markowitz

With a lively introduction that offers a cultural history of jewelry and its production, this accessible book offers concise explanations of key jewelry terms, styles, and techniques

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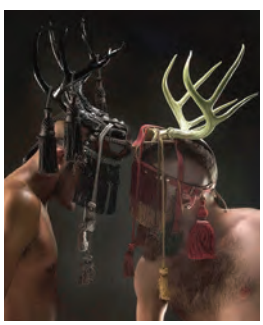

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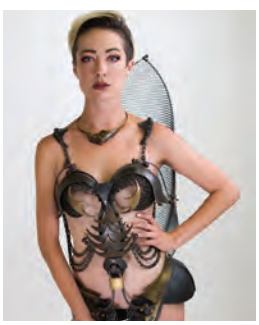

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NEW & NOTEWORTHY

BY JACKIE ANDREWS

CRUCIBLE: FORGING NEW PATHS

Since its debut during Munich Jewellery Week in March 2021, *Crucible* has been breaking new ground in the contemporary jewelry field. Featuring an inaugural exhibition in print in collaboration with contemporary jewelry publication *Current Obsession*, the *Crucible* platform is "curated by a collective of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage womxn artists, forging new spaces in underrepresented places for individuals and communities that identify as black, brown, Indigenous women/womxn and Q.T.BIPOC." The project's name is inspired by a passage from writer and civil rights activist Audre Lorde: "those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference..." The platform's ethos denotes exploration of "the nuances of intersectional identities" and experiences in order to create new, empowering narratives in the field.

Crucible's curatorial team is composed of Ethiopian and Dutch jeweler Kalkidan Hoex, Black British metalsmith and craftsperson Roxanne Simone, and Lao-British multi-dimensional artist Finchittida Finch. *Crucible's* open call invited artworks and writing that explored methods of "subverting the gaze" and creating "an oppositional gaze" experienced by BIPOC women and LGBTQIA+.

With more than sixty international artists in its roster, *Crucible's* exhibition in print is refreshingly multidisciplinary and multifaceted. Adornment is a clear focus, but inclusions like Ibiye Camp's *Coded Gaze* invite questioning of what constitutes "wearable" artworks. Referencing the term coined by computer scientist and activist Joy Buolamwini, Camp's *Coded Gaze* filter utilizes AI technology and facial recognition software to critique "the data-based rules humans have used to create algorithms that amplify inequities."

The relationship between body, adornment, and fashion is further explored in Melanie Issaka's *Dark and Lovely,* a strikingly high-contrast photograph featured on *Crucible's* cover, and fashion designer Nathan Klein's *The First Time He Kissed A Boy.* The lush patterns and color palettes of Klein's modeled garments are transformed on the page, turning a styled image into a composition fit for a Kehinde Wiley painting.

"Produced from a playlist of emotions," Dominique Renée's works bring new meaning to the term "statement jewelry." The bold colors and graphic aesthetic of Renée's *I KNOW Earrings* and *Not Alone Rings* are beautifully amplified by the striking art direction in the styled photographs. While the jewelry pieces are vibrant and fun, Renée's unique inspiration adds a depth of narrative to the works that feels both personal and universal.

Other standout works include Gabriel Hutchings's *Bolo Lingling-O,* which incorporates "elements of the Western and Eastern neck adornments" in both its title and imagery in a representation of the "the internal battle of what it means to be both Filipino and American." Hutchings's work reads as a deft study in contrasts; the visual weight of the cast aluminum bolo and the presence of the hand on the metal's surface counterbalances the vivid, machine-made form of the paracord.

These works represent merely a sample of the talent on display in *Crucible's* exhibition in print, which was a smash success. The contemporary jewelry field eagerly awaits *Crucible's* next initiative.

Crucible is currently seeking grant funding and other forms of financial support. Learn more about the *Crucible* project on their website, crucibleworld.com, and follow the project on Instagram at @cruc_ible.

FINDINGS

Dominique Renée
I KNOW Earrings, 2019
Premium PLA plastic, gold filled findings
2 x 3 in.

Not Alone Rings, 2019
Premium PLA plastic, gold filled ring base
¼ x ½ in.

Photo: Stacie Buhler

EXPANDING THE FIELD

ADORNMENT + THEORY BIPOC SEED GRANT

This past February, Chicago jewelry studio and shop Adornment + Theory launched its first-ever BIPOC Seed Grant. In alignment with Adornment + Theory's core values of bringing equity to the jewelry industry and creating opportunities for BIPOC artists, the grant provides financial support for BIPOC jewelers and art entrepreneurs across the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The program's name cleverly references the Mexican proverb "They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds."

The first round offered three $500 grants and was juried by fine artist Carlos Rolon, nail artist Ashley Crowe,

Gabriel Mahal Hutchings
Bolo Lingling-O, 2021
Cast aluminum, paracord
21 x 5 in.
Photo by the artist

Vincent Uribe of LVL3 Gallery, and curator Adia Sykes. Grant recipients in the first round included Zahra A., a Detroit-based visual artist and metalsmith; Day Brièrre, a Haitian-born digital illustrator and clay vessel designer; and Jasmine Delgado, a Chicago-based playwright. Viviana Langhoff, owner of Adornment + Theory, hopes to offer at least ten grants in the next round.

Adornment + Theory is currently accepting sponsors and donations for future rounds of the BIPOC Seed Grant program. To find out more about donating to the program, email hello@adornmentandtheory.com. You can further support the program by following Adornment + Theory (@adornmentandtheory) and their grant recipients on Instagram.

TITLE 1 SCHOOLS PROJECT

As vocational programs and traditional workshop classes largely disappear from American schools, metalsmith Cathryn Jasterzbski is launching a metalsmithing and jewelry program for a Title 1 high school. Designed to equip students with essential hands-on building and problem-solving skills, the program's current curriculum focuses on textile and metal techniques. Jasterzbski's plan to launch a dedicated metalsmithing and jewelry program in fall 2021 will profoundly increase her students' access to the metalsmithing field.

Jasterzbski attributes her inspiration for the program to two key realizations: her acute awareness of class disparity as a graduate student at the Rhode Island School of Design, and her dismay at the classism present in the divide between arts professions in academia and the skilled labor of their blue-collar industry counterparts. Youth programs like those hosted by the Baltimore Jewelry Center (where Jasterzbski was an Artist-in-Residence in 2019) were also influential. The program is intended to empower students to see creative careers as viable and fulfilling and to gain confidence and agency over their futures through a combination of technical skills, creativity, and business and financial literacy training. Put simply, Jasterzbski wants the program to "show her students what is possible for them" and help facilitate career pathways through connections with local unions, industry apprenticeships, craft schools, and arts colleges.

To support Jasterzbski's program, you can purchase tools and supplies from the program's Amazon wishlist, available through Jasterzbski's instagram account, @cathrynjasterzbski, or contact her through her website, www.cathrynjasterzbski.com. Industry leaders, artisans, business owners, and craft school professionals interested in offering apprenticeships, scholarships, and other forms of mentorship to her students are encouraged to reach out.

HEDENDAAGSE SIERADEN JEWELRY DATABASE

Esther Doornbusch is seeking image donations, critical and creative jewelry writing and research, and financial support for hedendaagsesieraden.nl, the open-access contemporary jewelry database she founded in 2016. Doornbusch is a Dutch art historian, cataloger at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and 2021 Finalist for the Art Jewelry Forum Susan Beech Mid-Career grant. Her goal for the database is to build a centralized and accessible archive that will evolve with the jewelry field. The database currently houses more than 1,000 entries, with an additional 3,000 in preparation: content ranges from articles, research, and gallery and exhibition publicity materials to high-resolution images of art jewelry collections. The database has a plugin tool that translates the text into more than 100 languages, a crucial step to ensure further accessibility.

Readers interested in supporting the database can do so in several ways. Artists, gallerists, collectors, and museum professionals can donate images and exhibition materials through the Image Donations form on the website. Writers, historians, and researchers interested in contributing to the database are encouraged to contact Doornbusch through the site's contact form. Monetary donations are accepted through the website, and Doornbusch is also seeking sponsorship for web development, grant funding, and other projects.

Jackie Andrews (@jackiegemcreative) is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, and emerging art historian based in rural Maryland. They are the co-founder of Power Clash Art.

EXPLORATIONS IN BLACK JEWELRY: COMMUNITY

BY SEBASTIAN GRANT

Joyce J. Scott and Art Smith
We Two, c. 1980
Brass, glass beads, leather
8 x 6½ in.
Boston Museum of Fine Arts
Image courtesy of Joyce J. Scott

A FORTUITOUS FRIENDSHIP CAN CREATE a lasting impact, and in the world of Black jewelry artists, those friendships can create history. So much of the legacy of Black jewelry comes from the camaraderie and deep relationships established between artists young and old. Threatened in the past by oppression and cultural erasure, it is through standing together as a community that artistic creativity can thrive. Additionally, as a community that has fought so hard throughout history for the survival of its heritage, a commitment to maintaining close bonds and a devotion to understanding the past has inspired an artistic ingenuity that was first truly established in the Harlem Renaissance and continued from the Black Arts Movement to various African American communities of today.

One example is the friendship between Baltimore jewelry artist Joyce J. Scott and Art Smith, who first met at the Haystack School of Crafts in Maine in the 1970s, when Scott attended Smith's workshop that focused on African and African American craft. "[Art] had the light, he had that brilliance, that shine that would allow people to come to him," says Scott.[1] Smith helped Scott hone her skill, find confidence in her work, and believe in her creativity.

Today Scott continues this generosity by mentoring other Black jewelry artists in Baltimore, giving hope to those who have felt alone in a crowded field, including artist Clyde Johnson. "All of the teachers I had were either white females [...] or males; I never had a Black instructor the entire time I was taking jewelry design," says Johnson. "It was in connecting with Joyce and other people whom she knew that I was able to see the Black voices in jewelry."[2] Finding community in jewelry design, Johnson creates electroformed copper pieces exploring themes of pain and remembrance in Black history, from the lynchings in the Jim Crow South to the current Black Lives Matter movement. In addition, Scott gifted Johnson with the original electroforming tank used by Art Smith—a physical transference of knowledge and heritage to the next generation.

Education is necessary for success in America, and in order to gain access to this path, a vibrant community is essential. Enslaved Africans were denied education as a means of maintaining power and control. Even post-emancipation, segregation laws restricted educational opportunities for Black Americans. Because of these challenges, education was key in the Black community's endeavors to free themselves from the bonds of poverty and racism.

The pursuit of education and the ever-flowing presence of creativity pushed Black artists and makers to form community centers in their neighborhoods, which provided students of all ages with opportunities to develop their talents in fine arts, metalsmithing, and jewelry making. Many of these locations opened in the 1930s with help from the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In the interest of restimulating job growth during the Great Depression, the WPA operated without discrimination by employing Black artists and established more than 100 community arts centers around the country, including many that served Black neighborhoods such as the Harlem Community Arts Center in 1938. These centers ignited the careers of important Black American artists, such as painters Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, and started many careers in Black American jewelry by providing metalsmith training.

Artist and storyteller Phyllis Bowdwin (who will be covered in a future article) reminisced recently about how she started working in metalworking in the late 1960s. When she couldn't find any jewelry to match a dress, she decided to make her own adornment, which inspired her to enroll in beadmaking at the 92nd Street Y in New York.[3] Community education was also greatly important to ceramic artist and designer Billye Oliver. In the '40s and '50s Oliver took classes at multiple community centers, honing her skills in ceramics,

Two small ceramic samples (date unknown) by Billye Oliver.

Image courtesy of Taylor Oliver

Joyce J. Scott and Art Smith

Image courtesy of Joyce J. Scott

Montgomery. After a career as an enamelist in the 1960s, Tann helped bring arts education to Black youth in Pasadena, California, as the establishing Director of the Watts Tower Arts Center.

The flourishing artistry of Scott and other Baltimore makers continues to inspire other Black artists to pursue jewelry in new and innovative ways. One such artist, Gracye Johnson, developed her own bead working style by mixing glass beads with natural found objects such as stone, amber, wood, or metal that she finds in her world travels.[7] She is also the co-founder of the Damali Bead Collective. Viewing beads as "an expression of your spirit, your nature," Johnson organizes beadmaking classes at her boutique to spread the joy of beadmaking to the people of Baltimore.[8] Students can learn new skills while connecting with their African roots.

Johnson's collective is but one example of the ways Black American arts communities throughout the country continue to thrive. Through learning and teaching, artists and designers build upon traditions in metalsmithing, beadwork, and other crafts; each individual contributes their own styles and ideas toward influencing the next generation. Their perseverance and commitment to community and education allows us to now recognize their legacy and recount their stories to emerging creatives.

Sebastian Grant is a curator, art historian, and professor at Parsons School of Design in New York City. He currently works as collections manager of the Susan Grant Lewin Art Jewelry Collection.

enameling, painting, sculpture, fabric design, and silversmithing.[4] Always focused on developing her artistic knowledge, Oliver moved within the circles of the Harlem Renaissance's greatest, often frequenting the studio of sculptor Henry Bannarn, where she would paint alongside Jacob Lawrence and Aaron Douglas. Her eponymous company produced ceramic earrings and cufflinks which featured abstract colorful designs in crackle glaze or in the styles of African masks, inspired by newfound Western interest in African art.

Just as important as the stories of student success are the stories of educators who diligently imparted their metalworking skills to the next generations. While not much research has been done about Thomas Usher, he played a prominent role as co-director of the Metal Craft Shop at Karamu House (at the time called the Playhouse Settlement), working with partner Frank Lee to provide the latest metalsmithing techniques to Cleveland's African American residents.[5] Usher did try to find his own success in jewelry making, submitting his work to the Cleveland Museum of Art's May show in the '30s and '40s, but paused his career to become a serviceman in World War II.[6] While he didn't receive much recognition beyond the Cleveland community, Usher played an essential role in educating artists such as Curtis Tann and Evangeline

1 Interview with Joyce J. Scott on Oct. 1, 2020. / **2** Interview with Clyde Johnson on Oct. 31, 2020. / **3** Interview with Phyllis Bowdwin on Nov. 3, 2020. / **4** Noted in the resumé of Billye Oliver. / **5** "Playhouse Settlement," *Cleveland Call and Post* (Cleveland, OH), Nov 10, 1938. / **6** "Artists Win Acclaim for Fine Exhibits: Hughie Smith Receives Cleveland Award On Two Entries," *Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (Chicago, IL), May 13 1939. / **7** Anne Tallent, "Beauty and the beads," *Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 5, 2006. / **8** Ibid.

Clyde Johnson
A Tree Remembers, 2013
Steel, jeweler's wax, copper, wood, rhinestones, amethyst
Various dimensions
Photo by the artist

ELLEN DURKAN: FORGE FASHIONED

BY MARJORIE SIMON

All the Ellens, a photograph by Rick Frane, shows the many stages of production that go into Ellen Durkan's forged fashions.

FOR HER 2013 TED TALK "Accessories for An Iron Maiden," blacksmith Ellen Durkan wore an outfit she had made herself.[1] More a corset than a dress, it was unusual in that her body was visible beneath the simple construction. Hemispheres of hammered copper formed a bra that erupted into three-foot-long spiculum "nipples" that ended in tendrils rising above the shoulders. Vertical boning in the corset terminated at the hips in floating, planished pendants. A filigree collar and head ornaments completed the outfit. Durkan, though still in her twenties at the time and not yet a skilled metalsmith, was confident, adventuresome, and intentional in her designs. The projected images of her eight-foot-tall graphite drawings hinted at sensational creations to come.

Durkan was introduced to blacksmithing as a graduate student at Towson University in Maryland. The work evolved organically from drawings to three-dimensional objects as her designs demanded greater control of the metal. In the absence of formal instruction, she sought out opportunities to learn wherever possible. In 2008, a teaching assistantship at Peters Valley School of Craft in New Jersey allowed her to observe and learn from instructor Dick Sargent and her fellow students. Her technical ability increased with each professional encounter, such as blacksmithing events and Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America (ABANA) conferences. She soon was creating full fashion statements based on her elaborate structures and leading workshops for students to create their own forged "garments."

Durkan has said that she creates "gates and puts them around people." Each garment begins as an eight to ten foot graphite drawing in densely layered detail, at once a template of how the construction should proceed and a standalone drawing of a fantastical costume; they inform the sculptures and work back and forth with them. Working under the name Iron Maiden Forge, Durkan champions women's agency, autonomy, and body ownership. Her stated philosophy begins with healthy self-knowledge about one's sexuality. This frank approach may make some people uncomfortable, but she considers that neither her intention nor her problem. Inspired by radical fashion designer Alexander McQueen, Durkan prefers to exhibit her work at performative runway shows. Real-life models, wearing Durkan's forged iron fashions and little else, parade to original music before the audience. A 2017 "Iron Maiden Runway" video shows Durkan working the forge, making the "gates," and later, doing the models' makeup before the performance.[2]

The oldest of nine children and home schooled in Wilmington, Delaware, Durkan began studying at Delaware College of Art and Design (DCAD) while still a teenager. Drawing and designing had always come naturally, and as a pre-teen, she began attending adult ceramics classes as another creative outlet. She received her BFA in sculpture from Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., and her MFA from Towson. Grants and merit scholarships along the way facilitated her education.

Durkan was an eager student of blacksmithing, but her first runway show, with its trial-and-error learning curve, fainting model, and pinched flesh showed her she needed to up her game. She welcomed every aspect of creating the runway performance. The dresses, individually designed for specific models, had to work with the body. Dressing and prepping the models involved gaining their trust. This responsibility was especially evident in working with a close friend who was modeling while undergoing treatment for breast cancer at the time. Durkan carefully constructed a collar that wouldn't interfere with the model's medical port. Despite her fragility at the time, the model felt courageous and cared for while wearing Durkan's custom-made garment. Similarly, the models, who have ranged six decades in age and a variety of shapes, sizes, and genders, blossom with the performative costumes. In Durkan's blacksmithing workshops, students also delight in making their own dramatic wearables.

Runway shows are time-consuming to plan and produce. In between productions, Durkan takes on a variety of projects to support herself and allow her to create the work she wants in the way she wants. She currently works with the Baltimore Knife and Sword Company, a group of armorers and bladesmiths more in line with traditional weapon makers than fashion designers. Along with forging, she does piercing and finely wrought chasing and repoussé for special projects.

Durkan is a committed teacher to her DCAD design and sculpture students, and enjoys giving workshops at blacksmithing events, at which students of all genders can make their own body armor such as corsets, bustiers, and medieval or gothic accoutrements. She also produces a jewelry edition to supplement the one-of-a-kind fashion work. These multiple jobs facilitate the custom fashion pieces, which are created for specific individuals.

Durkan projects a self-effacing conversational style in interviews, presentations, and demos. Still under forty years of age, she cannily uses digital communication, including Instagram, videos, radio interviews, dramatic photoshoots, and sophisticated use of music and image on her website. She collaborates with artists, musicians, models, photographers, and videographers to create multilayered installations of a parallel universe. Other media explorations include *SPEAK*, a video of women with and without masks; radio interviews on BlacksmitHER Radio, a blacksmithing podcast; and the witty "Teaching Sculpture online during the Zombie Apocalypse," a surreal instructional video produced during the pandemic, in which she mimed creating a skull out of clay. All are available for viewing on her website.

One male artist whose name is often mentioned alongside Durkan is Ira Sherman, whose work also carries sexual elements and encases nude women in metal. But Sherman's narrative is about protecting women from sexual predators. By contrast, Durkan's garments are made by a woman to be worn by women (though she has designed for men also). Unlike Sherman's machined, aggressive "anti-rape" sculptures, Durkan removes male variables from the equation and revels in women's ownership of one's own sexuality, strength, and power.

Blindheaded, 2008
Graphite drawing on paper
95 x 45 in.
Photo: Joe Hoddinott

By personalizing the garments and enabling others to make their own in workshops, Durkan encourages expression of one's sexuality. She has created a niche for self-expression that obviates cliches about the "male gaze." Her diverse models embody the Gothic aesthetic and daring spirit of her fashions. Not content simply to imagine and give form to "forged fashion," she animates her designs with lighting, music, and motion. The transformational power of masks, costumes, disguises, and Durkan's gates changes the body; the paint and makeup change the face. Add shoes, music, and the runway and *voila!* Everyday life falls away, and fantasy reigns.

Marjorie Simon is a maker, writer, and occasional curator based in Philadelphia.

1 www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCIAtJnxxIQ. / **2** Video on website www.ellendurkan.com.

Forged Fashion, 2018
Steel, leather
Various dimensions
Photo: Joe Hoddinott

INTIMATE AND INTRICATE JEWELRY

BY OLIVIA SHIH

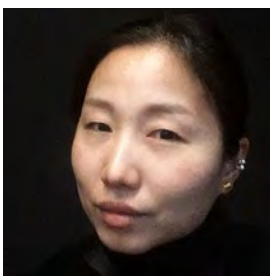
a

DURING THE PANDEMIC THAT ERUPTED WORLDWIDE in 2020, many people felt isolated and bereft of physical touch. We exchanged handshakes for elbow bumps and crowded events for social distancing. We stayed indoors and spent countless hours on our smart devices. After more than a year of lockdown and shelter-in-place orders, do we still know what it means to be close in person?

As parts of the world open up with the help of vaccines, we are re-examining our relationship to intimacy. What does it mean to be intimate? Will we have a new appreciation for it in a post-pandemic world?

Metalsmith presents contemporary jewelry that highlights the intricacies of intimacy: physical touch; personal emotions; secrets and hidden messages; and facing our fears.

a



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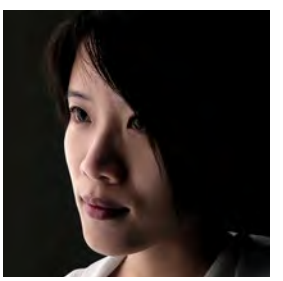

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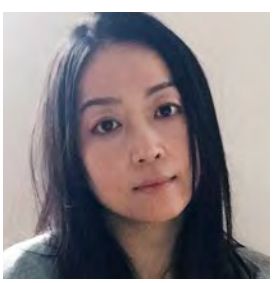


i

j

/a/ Snem Yildirim, *Sense and Sensation I*, 2020. Anodized aluminum, lenticular lens, paper, powder coated brass, 80 x 80 x 5 mm. Photo courtesy of the artist. **/b/ Dorry Hsu,** *Aesthetic of Fears*, 2014. Hand colored 3D printing resin, 15 x 10 x 8 cm. Photo: John McGrath. **/c/ Rebecca Schena**, *Medal of Freedom*, 2019. 24k gold-plated bronze, cubic zirconia, reflection hologram, synthetic textiles, 3 x 24 x ¾ in. Photo courtesy of the artist. **/d/ Dukno Yoon**, *Wings*, 2017. Argentium silver, stainless steel, feathers, 6 x 4½ x 3 in. Photo courtesy of the artist. **/e/ Eighteen (Yihan) Yuan**, *Peeling Rock Brooch*, 2020. Enamel, copper, sterling silver, steel, 5 x 2¼ x 1½ in. Photo: Lynn Batchelder. **/f/ Sam Tho Duong**, *Look2* (brooch), 2021. Oxidized silver, freshwater pearls, nylon, 95 x 95 x 25 mm. Photo: DuoSaTo. **/g/ Yu Fang Chi**, *The Nerve Ending—Congeal*, 2015–2017. Fine silver wire, 20 x 20 x 20 cm, dimensions variable. Photo: Cheng-Lin Wu. **/h/ Jennifer Moore**, *Pearl Brooch*, 2019. Copper, enamel, pearls, vellum, 90 mm diameter. Photo courtesy of the artist. **/i/ Shoko Kozu**, *Mother*, 2010. Wood, wool, cotton, silver, 25 x 5 x 2 cm. Photo courtesy of the artist. **/j/ Clio Herbert**, *Blinded and Muted by Our Guards*, 2020. Stainless steel, copper, sterling silver, garnets. 12 x 6 x 36 in. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Opposite:

Snem Yildirim (Turkey)
Architect and artist

Even though it is easy to reach the truth today, it is no longer important nor relevant. The *Tabula Rasa* series questions our digital personas and emotions by focusing on the standardized and artificialized expressions of the digital age.

c

Rebecca Schena (California, USA)
Jeweler, maker, and writer

Medal of Freedom draws upon the history of intimately concealed political resistance adornment. Within its gaudy, Trumpian exterior, a dissenting message of "FILTHY FUCKING FASCIST" is hidden in plain sight via a reflection hologram.

Dukno Yoon (Kansas, USA)
Associate professor at
Kansas State University

A pair of feathers emerges from two hinged rings, and flaps as the wearer bends the finger. These wings on the tip of the finger evoke an intimate connection with the wearer, as if one is holding a fragile life.

b

Dorry Hsu (United Kingdom/Taiwan)
Sculpture artist, jewelry designer, and director of Hsu Jewellery London

Fear is like a paper cut on the fingertip; it itches, affects you if you try to ignore it. This project is a visual representation of my personal fears and unease, which I recorded for forty days.

d

e

Eighteen (Yihan) Yuan (China/New York, USA)
Artist and jeweler

The marks left on a person by a traumatic experience can be physical scars or painful memories. These wounds linger, and are part of our growth, just like the weathered formation of cracks on a rock, or a piece of peeling birch bark.

Sam Tho Duong (Germany/Vietnam)
Jewelry designer

Jewelry always has to do with intimacy, because it is a personal means of expression for the individual. It is selected by the wearer according to his personal feelings and daily form.

f

g

Yu Fang Chi (Taiwan/Australia)
Artist and sessional lecturer at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

I trace shapes, wrinkles, and palm prints of my bare hand. Silver wires are twisted and woven, which like a flowing lace river comes across my skin and records my body history. The hollow jewelry resembles a second layer of skin, decorative but also restrictive.

Jennifer Moore (California, USA)
Artist and educator

It is hard to focus your eye upon a mound of pearls, heavily shrouded in many layers of vellum. The object appears to change depending on light and the viewer's vantage point. It questions what we are able to perceive and reveals a longing for clarity.

h

i

Shoko Kozu (Japan/New York, USA)
Artist

I reveal secrets (don't we all have secrets?) by making objects. The hidden desire to control someone, possess someone, as well as the infinite desire of being close to someone you love, is often so visible to everyone except yourself.

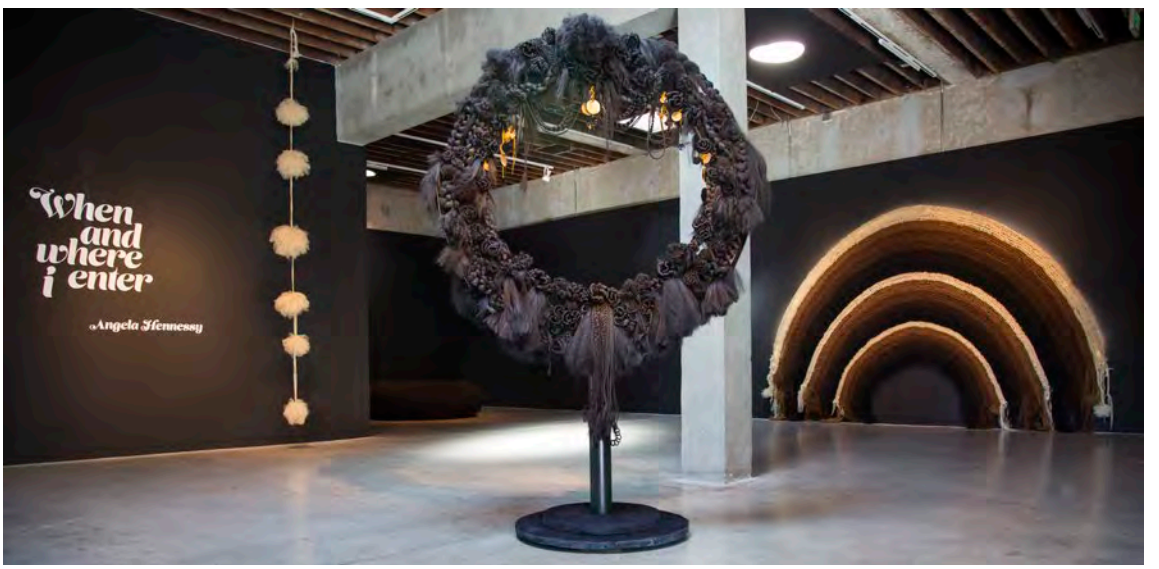
Clio Herbert (California, USA)
Artist and jeweler

The piece reflects our personal armor, built up over time. When worn, it presents the push and pull of intimacy and boundaries: our need for connection in spite of our fear of vulnerability.

j

ANGELA HENNESSY: INDIVIDUAL LOSS, COLLECTIVE GRIEVING

BY REBEKAH FRANK



Angela Hennessy
When and where I enter (installation view), 2017
Solo exhibition at Southern Exposure, San Francisco
Photo: Minoosh Zomorodinia

METAL WAS ANGELA HENNESSY'S first material love. She took jewelry classes in high school and studied jewelry and metalsmithing as an undergraduate at the California College of the Arts (CCA). Her formal training provided a grounding in material-focused history and processes that can be seen in her work today, which includes linked chain forms, deep material explorations, and a thematic scope that keeps the body central to her practice. However, she found the metal-y-ness of the jewelry department limiting and received her MFA from CCA's Textile department.

Hennessy spent her early childhood with the white, maternal side of her family, only briefly connecting with her Black father. After he passed away, Hennessy established relationships with the paternal side of her extended family. The experience of family disruption, then expansion, and the lack of a filial connection led Hennessy to reflect on the complexity of grieving relationships, both known and unknown. In a larger cultural context, Hennessy's experience of grieving untethered relationships directly correlates to the violence and disruption of the African Diaspora as it severed familial ties, creating gaps in ancestral identity. She says: "Ultimately, what I am trying to do is to make myself recognizable to my ancestors—I'm trying to communicate with my dead people. Everything I make is in service of them."[1]

Hennessy's process is an act of self-care that allows her to remain in communion with her ancestors while creating tactile and seductive objects. She builds her work through small movements. The lightning-fast motion of fingers plaiting hair, the crochet hook diving in and out of loops, the repetitive strokes of combing hair into perfect poufs, and the linking of gold twist ties repeat to create Hennessy's immersive installations. The work is meditative and laborious, providing time to sit with the feelings of loss and grief central to her practice.

The Victorian-era tradition of mourning jewelry was an early interest for Hennessy. At its simplest, it involved saving a snippet of hair from a recently deceased loved one, often in a locket. It also included braiding hair into bracelets and creating elaborate jewelry and wreaths by weaving hair from the dead into complex decorative elements. In her 2017 exhibition *Passed By This Way* at Southern Exposure in San Francisco, Hennessy intricately arranged Black hair to create *When and where I enter*, a nearly nine-foot-tall mourning wreath, with braided edges, tufts of dangling hair, loose and tight weaves, linked chains made of tightly braided hair, and, from the top, small medallions dangling into the interior space. Historically, mourning wreaths were a public acknowledgment of death placed on the door of a grieving family. In Hennessy's hands, the wreath is

This is the first in a multipart series celebrating artists whose practices illustrate *jewelry thinking*. These artists may or may not have a background in jewelry, but their work exhibits qualities that jewelry artists will recognize, including commitment to materiality, respect of process, and focus on the body. A companion to this article was published on Art Jewelry Forum as part of their *Jewelry||Adjacent* series.

scaled up to a public recognition of the collective grief of Black Americans.

Hennessy also considers other cultural traditions of grief and mourning. While in the Victorian tradition mourners collected hair from the deceased as mementos, in some African cultures, shaving the hair of the living was a ritualized act of grief. Of her research she states, "Hair has long served as a material exchange between the living and the dead. As a symbol of one's identity, hair becomes a potent reminder of the separation caused by death."[2]

Hair is not a neutral material. In *blacklets: a speck of soot or dirt* from 2007, Hennessy's laborious process of unraveling black velvet creates piles of black fuzz and black string that resemble discarded Black hair on a barbershop floor after a haircut. Beyond generalized ideas of abjection which frame hair as a cast-off waste material of the body, using Black hair as material references the history of violence against Black bodies. If grieving rituals involve voluntary shaving of a mourner's head, what does it mean that slave traders forcibly shaved the heads of enslaved Black people to remove their agency and identity? Hennessy engages with the heaviness of this history, grieving the physical and psychological violence done to Black families and their lineages, and invites Black viewers to remember their ancestors while asking others to consider how intersecting histories affect the living.

To further explore her material choices, one must consider culturally enforced Eurocentric beauty standards that favor straight hair and create unattainable and painful expectations of Afro-textured hair. Rejecting these standards limits mobility in a system that rewards whiteness (as well as hetero normativity), leaving Black women (and men) little choice but to experiment with ways to straighten their hair, resulting in damaged hair and scalps. These beauty standards create a multimillion-dollar global industry of products for Black hair, along with salves to soothe and heal the damage done by the products—a vicious cycle.

Angela Hennessy
Mourning Wreath (detail), 2017
Synthetic and human hair, found hair, artist's hair, gold leaf on copper, enamel paint, chain, wire frame, cement base
105 x 72 in., base diameter 36 in.
Photo courtesy of the artist

Hair isn't the only material Hennessy uses in her work. For the installation *Bling*, included in the exhibition *A History of Violence* organized by the Queer Cultural Center in San Francisco, she wrapped gold twist ties and braided hair around foam forms that were linked to create scaled-up chains. These chains simultaneously reference the oppressive chains of slavery and the gold chains worn by rappers that signify wealth and success. For Hennessy, the chains speak to the complex nature of objects, "how an object can call up a particular history and still be of the present moment."[3]

Angela Hennessy
blacklets: a speck of soot or dirt, 2007
Unraveled velvet fuzz, thread wood, steel table
42 x 22 x 16 in.
Photo courtesy of the artist

Hennessy combines her artistic research with her volunteer work in which she sits with the dying and their families. In addition, she is a professor at CCA with a focus on cultural narratives of mortality and art world representations of grief. Hennessy inhabits three distinct cultural identities that experience an inordinate amount of loss through violence: the Black and LGBTQIA+ communities while being a woman in both. Through her work, she sheds light on the healing that emerges when those affected take the time to acknowledge and grieve loss, both individually and collectively.

Like many artists, Hennessy displays her work in white-walled gallery spaces. To mitigate the whiteness, she paints the walls behind her work black. The power of this seemingly small gesture was further explored when she painted an entire gallery space black for *Passed By This Way* at Southern Exposure. Against the black walls, Hennessy presented her pieces *Unidentified Grieving Objects*, hanging poufs of either all Black or blond hair, extending from the ceiling to just above the floor, and *Black Rainbow,* which used a gradient of Black to blond hair in a macrame rainbow lit from behind. Through her innovative material and curatorial choices, Hennessy transforms the gallery from a place of sterile viewing to a place of collective grieving of historic and current violence against Black, queer, and women's bodies.

Works by Angela Hennessy will be included in *Queer Threads* at the San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles from April 13 to July 3, 2022.

Rebekah Frank is a studio artist and independent writer who enjoys traveling the world in search of interesting experiences to fuel both her art and writing practices.

1 Maria Porges, "Mortal Coils: A Conversation with Angela Hennessy," *Sculpture*, July 30, 2019. https://sculpturemagazine.art/mortal-coils-a-conversation-with-angela-hennessy. / **2** Angela Hennessy, artist statement for the 2018 exhibition "Passed By This Way" at the Patricia Sweetow Gallery, accessed online May 1, 2021. https://www.patriciasweetowgallery.com/exhibitions/passed-by-this-way. / **3** Porges.

THE AMERICAN OBJECT: REVISITED

BY MATTHEW K. LIMB

Objects: USA 2020
By Glenn Adamson
New York: The Monacelli Press, 2020
Hardcover, 232 pp, $50

FEW EXHIBITIONS HAVE BEEN AS CRUCIAL to our historical understanding of the American studio craft movement as *Objects: USA*. Curated by Paul J. Smith and Lee Nordness, the exhibition opened on October 3, 1969, at the National Collection of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum) in Washington, DC. The show featured more than 500 artworks in ceramic, fiber, glass, metal, and wood by 308 artists and traveled to 33 venues domestically and abroad over the next three years. Featuring both established and emerging artists, the exhibition introduced Sheila Hicks and Dale Chihuly to the international art scene and cemented the importance of figures like George Nakashima and Arline Fisch within the annals of American craft history. The exhibition was a tour de force of the nation's craftspeople, full of creative energy and individual expression, and inspired the general public and a generation of makers from California to the Soviet Union.

Objects: USA debuted at a moment of intense public interest in the craft of the United States. In 1966, *LIFE* magazine, the most influential publication in the United States, published "The Old Crafts Find New Hands," a glossy photo essay featuring thirteen American makers at work. This article exposed the American public to the "sophisticated and trained artisans" of midcentury craft. That same year, President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration began encouraging the development of craft as a small-scale industry to boost economic growth. Both the Johnson and Nixon administrations encouraged traveling exhibitions of American art, craft, and design objects to showcase American cultural ingenuity as a weapon of soft power in the Cold War. Viewed as an alternative to mass production, the American craft object provided artistically inclined consumers with unique objects to express themselves and fill their homes. *Objects: USA* sought to harness this energy to elevate craft materials within the fine arts and to provide a national assessment of the developing field.

The *Objects: USA* exhibition catalog, published in 1970, was a critical source of information for collectors, educators, makers, and historians in navigating craft media and its history. The catalog paid tribute to makers and mapped the decentralized nature and loose networks of American craft production. Nordness intended the catalog to act as a "pictorial survey of the art objects being created in the United States" and included photographs of the exhibition's artists, their biographies, and examples of their work. This approach created an encyclopedic who's who of American craft that canonized the makers found therein—both for teaching in the academy and buying in the art market.

In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of *Objects: USA*, the exhibition, book, and its legacy are being revisited in *Objects: USA 2020*. Curated by Glenn Adamson, James Zemaitis, and Lena Vigna, *Objects: USA 2020* opened at the New York City design gallery R & Company in February 2021. This new exhibition features 100 artists, 50 chosen from the 1969 show and 50 contemporary makers. The subsequent book published by Monacelli Press follows the model of the 1970 catalog by providing photographs of the artists, their work, and brief artist profiles along with critical essays. By welding together past and present, Adamson, Zemaitis, and Vigna highlight the resilience and innovation of craft and its ability to engage with contemporary issues.

The *Objects: USA 2020* catalog features a wide diversity of makers that push the boundaries of

Art Smith
Neckpiece, 1968
Sterling silver
7½ x 9 x 2⅛ in.
Courtesy of the Museum of Arts and Design; gift of the Johnson Wax Company, through the American Craft Council, 1977
Photo: John Bigelow Taylor

the term "craft." Glenn Adamson in his essay "Objects? USA?" argues that craft is "now used more as a verb than a noun. What this means in practice is that craft's position in the arts has been reconceived." Since the initial 1969 exhibition, artists have increasingly embraced fluidity with their materials and resist being fixed to one specific discipline. It is no longer a field separate from the fine arts or a fixed category of objects defined by their materials. Craft now prioritizes competency in action and applies to a variety of creative activity, whether it be building a prototype, designing couture, or making a sculpture.

One of the great strengths of the book is the ability to see the evolution of making over a fifty-year period. What is striking is how utterly contemporary many of the historical objects feel as they push the boundaries of materials, form, and space. Due to the book's format, however, it is more difficult for the reader to assess how a maker or object's engagement with social, economic, and political issues evolved during the same period. One example is Art Smith, the African American metalsmith and jeweler based in Greenwich Village during the mid-twentieth century. The curvilinear lines and organic designs of Smith's jewelry treated the body as a key component of his work. He embraced adornment to celebrate the beauty of the black body during the Civil Rights Movement.

A contemporary counterpart of Smith's might be the Detroit interdisciplinary artist Tiff Massey. Trained as a metalsmith at Cranbrook Academy of Art, since 2014 Massey's work has combined the aesthetics of 1980s hip-hop culture with traditional African fashion and hairstyling to make large-scale wearable sculptures and installations. Massey's ornamentation of the African American body (which she has referred to as an "everyday arsenal") is an uncompromising celebration of black culture that examines economic vitality, empowerment, and the self-perception of the wearer. Both Smith and Massey examine the transformative effects of the object on and for black bodies against a backdrop of a hostile and racist white America. The format of the *Objects: USA 2020* catalog is designed to provide a bite-sized introduction to a variety of artists along with images of their work. This encyclopedic format works against the need to examine the evolution of crucial social issues across time and misses an important opportunity to meaningfully engage with critical conversations.

In the book, Adamson's essay provides a dose of criticality needed to unpack both the historical legacies of the show and the contemporary currents running throughout. Adamson questions the role of the object implicit in the exhibition's title. In the past fifty years, "the rise of digital technology has directed attention away from the physical realm…our current era is witnessing a comparable displacement of value, away from physical things entirely, in favor of purely intellectual property." Yet Adamson does not see the digital and analog craft necessarily in opposition to one another. Rather, virtual technology and digital communication have given contemporary object making a more expansive awareness.

A growing awareness of the ecological impact of objects has encouraged makers to reconsider their own processes. New strategies of repair, recycling, and upcycling objects are necessary to combat climate change. More importantly, makers must reexamine and redesign entire systems of production rather than relying on the singular object to enact change; after all, "climate change simply cannot be averted one object at a time."

Perhaps the most glaring flaw of the exhibition and catalog is that they simply feel outdated. The initial *Objects: USA* book was a cultural milestone largely because the information was not readily available elsewhere. The book served to briefly introduce readers to the names and work of important American craftspeople and provided a jumping off point for further research. Now, with social media and the internet at our fingertips, the brief bite-sized artist profiles feel like an inadequate snack when your stomach is craving a four-course meal. The social, political, economic, and environmental needs of the moment are pressing and demand greater self-examination on the part of our cultural institutions, curators, and academia. We need books that address craft and climate change, wealth inequality, systemic racism, colonialism, and the blatant appropriation of the cultures of oppressed peoples. However, there is something about *Objects: USA 2020* that remains endearing. Adamson's essay is hopeful, optimistic, and encouraging. It is a celebration of the power that lies in the act of making. If anything, the book demonstrates that craft is enduring and has great potential to address larger cultural problems.

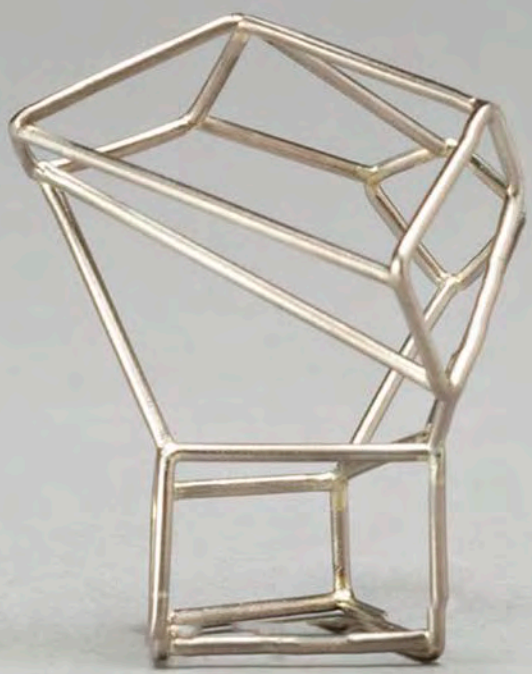
Tiff Massey
Yo Mamma's Earring, 2020
Brass
11½ x 1 x 11½ in.
Image courtesy of the artist and R & Company
Photo: Joe Kramm

Matthew K. Limb is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

MONEL METAL

Modern as Tomorrow

By Ana M. Lopez



Previous spread:
Carlier Makigawa
Rings, 2015
Monel, silver
Left to right:
3½ x 3½ x 2 cm
4 x 3 x 3 cm
5 x 3 x 3 cm
Photo: Jeremy Dillon

What do an American cathedral, an innovative Art Deco interior, and a handful of Australian jewelers have in common?

They all utilize the nickel alloy Monel.

Though it is now quite obscure, from its discovery in 1905 until the middle of the twentieth century, Monel and its neutral gray coloring was welcomed into the formal language of Modernism, and its corrosion resistance helped create the market now occupied by stainless steel. Over the years, artists, designers, and craftspeople have all been seduced by Monel's silvery sheen and promise of longevity.

Monel, also known as Alloy 400, is a nickel alloy containing roughly sixty-three percent nickel, twenty-eight percent copper, and small amounts of other elements. It was developed by the International Nickel Company in 1905 when they smelted a copper-nickel ore from the Sudbury Basin in Canada. The first cast bar was stamped "Monell Metal" in honor of the company's president, Ambrose Monell. Because proper names could not be trademarked, the second "l" was dropped and the alloy was named Monel. The International Nickel Company promoted the metal as "Modern as Tomorrow" in their 1930 advertising film, and it may have been just that, had it not been for the rising price of nickel. The alloy is extremely resistant to corrosion. When heated, it develops a tough, oxidized black surface. Monel may be machined, forged, spun, cast, brazed, stamped, and welded with gas or electricity but not in a traditional coal forge.

The first significant public use of this alloy was for the original roof of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in New York City, which was completed in 1910. Thereafter, architectural hardware was a major market for Monel in the forms of roofs, gutters, flashing, and ornamental details for a growing number of skyscrapers. The use of Monel became so widespread in the early twentieth century that it is hard to find an industry that did not incorporate it in some way. Monel was used for Army identification tags, propellers for battleships, golf club heads, commercial cookware, railroad dining cars, and even Gibson guitar strings.

In 1913, wrought Monel essentially did not exist. Therefore, its adoption as the primary metal used in the construction of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, is just one of the factors that make the edifice so remarkable. Bryn Athyn Cathedral was a

Herman Rosse
Left to right:
Covered tureen, *Covered urn*, *Vase*, 1928
Covered tureen: 5½ x 10¼ in.
Covered urn: 8 x 5¼ in.
Vase: 9¾ x 4 in.
Monel metal
Gift of S. Helena Rosse Trust, 2000
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.
Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Image source: Art Resource, NY

project funded by businessman John Pitcairn, who had made his money in the plate glass industry. He was a devoted member of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, which holds beliefs founded on the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg. The construction of the Cathedral began in 1913 and came to be overseen by John's son, Raymond Pitcairn.

Monel was initially only considered for the roof of the Cathedral. It may have come to the attention of Pitcairn through the promotion of its use for Pennsylvania Station. Although medieval in inspiration, the metalwork was cutting-edge, as Monel was a relatively new alloy, and the means of welding it, the oxyacetylene torch, was only made available in 1903. After much experimentation, Monel was eventually used for the architectural ornament throughout the cathedral.

More challenging to forge than iron and considerably more expensive, it is believed that Monel was selected for use throughout the project for its promised longevity. In a letter, Raymond Pitcairn wrote, "Monel metal is a good deal harder to work than iron and until recently we have been unable to obtain character, particularly on flat surfaces, which is readily obtained in working soft iron when worked at a heat which brings out its best texture. Our last efforts indicate, however, that we have overcome the difficulties experienced during months of work and it is a great satisfaction to work on a metal which will not rust away."[1] The Pitcairns were building to honor God, and nothing but the most enduring of materials would do.

The entirety of the building project of Bryn Athyn Cathedral was a remarkable enterprise. The workshops of the metal, stone, wood, and glass artisans were all located onsite. Major architectural elements underwent a lengthy developmental process. For example, the most significant elements of metalwork, such as the arcade screen, were sketched, painted at scale, modeled in plaster, and worked out in iron before being translated into the more expensive Monel. The design of the extraordinary west door was influenced by the wrought iron hinges of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and the West Portal of St.-Gilles-du-Gard in Provence. The designer, Parke E. Edwards, studied cast plaster replicas located at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Carnegie Museum of Art, respectively. The door is composed of foliate scrollwork arranged in tightly packed horizontal bands of alternating heights and is surmounted by a tympanum featuring a horse with a rider wearing a crown and holding a bow. The resulting aesthetic of the cathedral metalwork is a unique interpretation of the Gothic sensibilities that inspired it. The longer one looks at a screen or a railing, the more one sees. The initial appearance of regularity and symmetry dissolves into a visual tapestry of distinct details.

Each metal element was considered and designed as a unique undertaking. Very few motifs repeat, which means that the plan for every doorknob, handrail, and grille was arrived at individually. The most striking example of the bespoke nature of the craftsmanship may be the key cabinet. Still on display, it holds the keys to every lock in the cathedral. Each key is distinctive in its ornamentation and exclusively fits the lock for which it was created. The metalwork at Bryn Athyn Cathedral is the most significant use of wrought Monel in the world, but other examples followed.

Samuel Yellin was arguably the most talented and prolific creator of wrought ironwork in US history, but he also used Monel. Active in Philadelphia between 1909 and 1940, Yellin employed more than 200 men at the height of his shop. How Yellin came to be aware of the nickel alloy is unknown. Monel was being advertised in building trade publications, and there was also some overlap between his shop and the Bryn Athyn cathedral metalworkers. Parke E. Edwards had been a student of Yellin's at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art, and at least one of the blacksmiths who worked with Edwards,

Simon Cottrell
Flection Edge (pendant), 2018
Monel400, upcycled waste woven nylon cord
5½ x ¾ x ¾ in.
Photo by the artist

The use of Monel became so widespread in the early twentieth century that it is hard to find an industry that did not incorporate it in some way.

Mathias Schmidt, had previously worked for Yellin. As Bryn Athyn is only thirty miles outside Philadelphia, it is not difficult to believe they were in conversation.

Evidence suggests, however, that Edwards was using Monel long before Yellin, whose first job in Monel did not appear in his books until 1920. According to his shop records, Yellin's first use of the nickel alloy was for a private residence on Star Island in Florida in 1920. Later commissions undertaken in Monel by Yellin include the gates of the Straus Mausoleum in Woodlawn Cemetery in New York City and the Hall of Graduate Studies entrance gates at Yale University. Two generations later, Clare Yellin still provided Monel as an option for commissions as she continued the family business.

While some ironworkers were turning to this nickel alloy for forged work, stamped Monel became fashionable for use in decorative trims, radiator covers, and elevator doors in the Art Deco style. Some forward-thinking designers were also starting to consider the new metal for domestic interiors. The spirit of progress and optimism in the 1920s led to the use of aluminum, stainless steel, and Monel by interior designers.

The acceptance of metal for domestic interiors in the US was, in part, due to several significant New York showcases of interior design. Herman Rosse's dining room in the American Designers Gallery in 1928 was a (literally) shining example of this new way of thinking about materials. The avant-garde display was lauded in many contemporary periodicals. "Herman Rosse's dining room was one of the exciting corners. Everything in it is of metal—the walls of monel metal lacquered deep blue, a steel table, highly polished, metal vases, dessert plates, fruit stands, etc.; the chairs of chromium plated steel upholstered blue, and the ceiling covered with a metal lighting fixture,"[2] gushed Mary Fanton Roberts in *Arts & Decoration*. It was metal used in a quantity not previously seen in the American home. The polished Monel vessels that were on display exhibit a reductive classicism that feels contemporary to this day.

The clean lines of machine production became part of the aesthetic of the modern home as the twentieth century progressed. In the *Machine Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1934, one of the most popular objects on display was the *Streamline Monel* sink designed by Gustav Jensen and produced by the International Nickel Co. In fact, it was the seventh runner up in the public voting for most beautiful object in the exhibition. Several fine artists of the midcentury incorporated Monel into various aspects of their practice as well, including sculptors Seymour Lipton, Ron Hayes Pearson, and Harry Bertoia.

In the 1950s, Monel was largely replaced by stainless steel and aluminum, which were both less expensive and could perform almost all the same tasks. It was largely in industries that needed extreme corrosion resistance, like desalinization plants and chemical dyers, that Monel continued to be the metal of choice. Only a few blacksmiths and jewelers have chosen to work with this temperamental metal since the middle of the last century.

In the blacksmithing community, in the past few decades most individuals who have worked with Monel are aware of Samuel Yellin's use of the metal. The person many of them turned to for technical help was Michael Bondi. There exists a general consensus that Bondi's work paved the way for a rediscovery of Monel in the 1980s. Bondi had seen Monel listed in some of Samuel Yellin's work, but it was not until he encountered some problems with stainless steel that he thought to turn to this lesser known alloy himself. At the time, it cost twice as much as stainless, but could produce a silvery surface that did not need to be treated for corrosion resistance once forged, as stainless did. His contacts at large industrial forges helped provide information about working with it. At the time, Bondi used a mixed palette of different colored nonferrous metals, and Monel added to this variety. When the price of the nickel alloy jumped precipitously, he stopped using it because most customers

Left:
The Monel keys of Bryn Athyn Cathedral, located in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

Courtesy of the Bryn Athyn Historic District, Bryn Athyn, PA
Photo: Edwin Herder

Opposite:
The Monel west porch door of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, located in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

Courtesy of Bryn Athyn Cathedral, Bryn Athyn, PA
Photo: Hal Rosner

Nunc Licet
Intellectualiter Intrare In Arcana Fidei

Through the influence of a few high-profile makers and their relationships with academic institutions, Australian studio jewelers have kept this alloy conversant in the field.

were not willing to pay the higher material costs. Another lingering issue, according to Bondi, is that the blacksmithing field tends to be very conservative. Between the cost, traditionalists, and lack of interest from clients, Monel largely goes unused in contemporary forged work.[3]

However, individuals working in coastal locations, where an investment in a more corrosion-resistant metal might make the most sense, are exceptions. Glenn Gilmore used Monel for exterior metalwork that was installed outside a home right on the ocean. He had seen it used in the swimming pool ladder at the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina as well as in some Yellin projects. When he proposed it for exterior fireplace screens and wall grilles that were going to be subjected to salt air, the client agreed. Gilmore contacted the Nickel Institute for information about how to work with Monel. He used traditional blacksmithing connections, such as mortise and tenon joints, to create a screen with metal crabs scuttling across. Gilmore laments the alloy's lack of popularity. "People don't want to spend that kind of money to experiment," he says, "I think it's a wonderful material, actually."[4] Joel Schwartz, Alex Klahm, and Joe Ponsler at Wonderland Products are also wrought iron designers who have used Monel for customers who did not mind the higher price paid in exchange for architectural work that would stand up to saltwater and other environmental factors.

At the scale of architecture, the cost of Monel is prohibitive. When compared to silver and other metals of the jewelry trade, however, this ceases to be a problem. While relatively unknown to most American studio jewelers, a faction of notable Australians has used Monel. Through the influence of a few high-profile makers and their relationships with academic institutions, Australian studio jewelers have kept this alloy conversant in the field. Carlier Makigawa is probably the person most responsible for the awareness of Monel in that community. Makigawa heard of Monel through several channels: her husband was exposed to it as a sailor and a sculptor, and her professor, Ray Stebbins, had studied at the Royal College of Art in London where colleagues had used it. Attracted to the structural rigidity and the neutral grey that contrasts "like shadows"[5] with silver, Makigawa has been using Monel in her jewelry for decades. For her, the color was similar to the stainless steel she had been using, but the material did not bring the risk of rust. Makigawa's works frequently feature cagelike constructions of linear wires defining volumes in space, for which Monel's rigidity must be an asset.

It was Magikawa who introduced Simon Cottrell to Monel when he was a student of hers at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in the early 1990s. At the time, he had been working with copper, silver, and gold, but "when I write on a pad of paper my writing tends to turn up fifteen, twenty pages down into the pad, so the softer metals are just like cheese to me,"[6] he says. The nickel alloy suits the crisp forms Cottrell creates. Monel's durability and lack of ready oxidation gives his work an endurance that he appreciates. "As soon as I started playing with it, I thought, I like this, this is exactly what my hands are looking for: something that is a bit more rigid, that you can drop it on the floor and nothing happens to it." It has become Cottrell's primary material, and he uses it to render jewelry of precise planes with intersecting tabs, as well as tapering cones that look like the work of machines. Other notable Australian jewelers who have worked with Monel include Johannes Kuhnen, Tracey Clement, and Mark Edgoose.

Carlier Makigawa
Bracelet, 2006
Monel, silver
11 x 8 x 2½ cm
Photo: Terrance Bogue

Opposite, above:
Glenn Gilmore
The Crab Grill (Hilton Head Island, South Carolina), 1999
39 x 30 x 3 in.
Monel
Photo: Tommy McNabb Studio

Opposite, below:
Michael Bondi
Fan Gate (private residence Saddle Brook, NJ), 1997
96 x 192 x 5 in.
Forged and fabricated Monel, bronze, copper
Photo: Michael Bondi Metal Design

Monel's unique characteristics and working properties have found their way into the decorative arts at some telling moments. While it may not have become the metal of the future that the International Nickel Company predicted it would be, it was definitely an important element of the early twentieth century. And, just as their 1930 promotional film predicted, for some artisans "Monel has passed the acid test of time, meeting the exacting demands of an advanced civilization."[7]

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1 Correspondence from Raymond Pitcairn to Mr. A. Kingsley Porter, December 22, 1920, Glencairn Museum Archives, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. / **2** Mary Fanton Roberts, "Beauty Combined with Convenience in Some Modernistic Rooms" in *Arts & Decoration*, February 1929, 112. / **3** Michael Bondi, conversation with the author, November 26, 2018. / **4** Glenn Gilmore, conversation with author, June 26, 2019. / **5** Carlier Makigawa, email to author, September 10, 2019. / **6** Simon Cottrell, conversation with author, June 10, 2019. / **7** "Monel Metal—Modern As Tomorrow," International Nickel Company, 1930. 14:29.

RIN

GS!

By Elizabeth Essner

Keith Lewis, b. 1959
American
XX:XX Ring, 2002
Sterling silver, 18k gold, pencil, enamel on copper
Photo: Virginia Price

HELEN DRUTT,

an author, curator, collector and unparalleled authority on contemporary jewelry, had not exactly planned to curate an exhibition on rings. However, in 2016, the jewelry doyenne received a ring as a gift from a friend by artist Monica Cecchi. Placing it next to other rings on a shelf in her home, Drutt had an "aha" moment, marveling at how each was its own universe of creation. **SAM THO DUONG**'s *LOOK ring*, a shimmering fantasy of seed pearls, shared space with *Trust Fund Baby,* Manfred Bischoff's enigmatic winged bird rendered in gold and coral. Nearby sat **KEITH LEWIS**'s *XX:XX Ring*, its double-sided female torso intended as part of his series validating sex for a range of orientations. Each ring was a distinct counterpoint to its companions.

From then on, Drutt kept rings in the forefront of her mind—those from her own collection and by artists in her international orbit. Soon she realized she had a substantial assemblage, and a vision for an exhibition that would span more than five decades, from 1968 to the present day. I assisted Drutt with *RINGS!* as the exhibition grew from a core selection of thirty-one pieces shown at the Lalaounis Boutique during New York Jewelry Week in 2019, to more than one hundred and fifty works by artists spanning four continents. Presented this past summer at The Galleries at Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia, next year *RINGS!* will travel to the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft and the Metal Museum in Memphis from January to June.

Now ninety years old, Drutt has been an essential voice in jewelry for decades, heading her eponymous gallery—a Philadelphia landmark—from 1973 to 2002. Drutt's latest investigation of rings draws on her vast history in the field, and on recent scholarship, led by Beatriz Chadour-Sampson's publications documenting the landmark Alice and Louis Koch Collection. *RINGS!* is in good company, as curatorial focus on the form has recently bloomed. *Ring Redux: The Susan Grant Lewin Collection* opened in August at the SCAD Museum of Art in Georgia, and an upcoming display in London at Goldsmiths' Hall will tell the story of its modern jewelry collection through twenty or so rings during the historic institution's annual fair this fall.

At The Galleries at Moore, *RINGS!* was installed in constellation-like clusters, which linked formal affinities, material connections, and artistic relations. Drutt's distinguished eye and longtime bonds with artists guided her selections, resulting in an exhibition that layered sculptural expressions and personal narratives across the landscape of the ring form.

Just after *RINGS!* opened at Moore, Drutt and I had a wide-ranging discussion. She shared her vision for the exhibition and a few of the many stories behind the rings. Chosen by Drutt, this selection gives way to the larger historical and artistic contours that have shaped *RINGS! 1968–2021*.

Previous spread:

Sam Tho Duong, b. 1969
Vietnamese (active Germany)
LOOK ring, 2014
Oxidized silver, freshwater pearls, nylon
Photo: Virginia Price

A ring by the Japanese-born American jeweler **MIYÉ MATSUKATA** is deceptively simple at first glance. "Until you look closely, you don't realize what it is," Drutt explains. Matsukata often incorporated historic elements into her work, and this ring's central motif is actually an antique Japanese sword guard or *Tsuba*. Its mix of metals is echoed in the ring's band.

Miyé Matsukata, 1922–1981
American (born Japan)
Ring, c. 1975
Found object (Tsuba or Japanese sword guard), silver, gold
Photo: Virginia Price

German goldsmith-turned-sculptor **CLAUS BURY**'s use of colored acrylic encapsulates the experimental moment of its creation, the year 1970, making it one of the earliest rings in the exhibition. However, its construction also nods to traditional skill, as Bury lavishes the modern material with the same precision as gold.

Claus Bury, b. 1946
German
Ring, 1970
Gold, acrylic
Promised Gift of the Helen Williams Drutt Family Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Photo: Virginia Price

Falko Marx, 1941–2012
German
Heilige, 1985
Gold, porcelain, diamonds, liquid, platinum, glass
Photo: Virginia Price

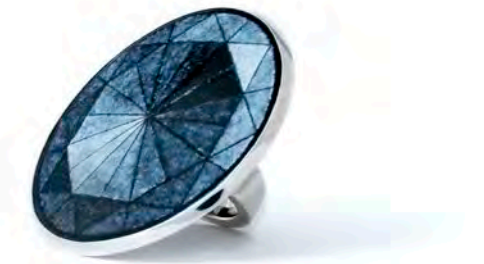
For Drutt, wearing jewelry is a way to publicly share the history of the field. By answering questions, "you restore the presence of that artist," she explains. It is easy to understand how **FALKO MARX**'s ring garners attention, as platinum needles and gold granules float like an aura around the saintly painted porcelain. "If I'm sitting in a train station with my hand on my lap, and the person next to me asks, 'What's that?'" says Drutt, "suddenly that person knows about Marx who would never have known about him otherwise."

Made more than a decade apart, rings by **DAVID WATKINS** and **WENDY RAMSHAW**, the groundbreaking British contemporary jewelry couple, are a study in correspondence and contrast.

David Watkins, b. 1940
British
Ring, 1972
Silver, pearls
Photo courtesy of the artist

Wendy Ramshaw, 1939–2018
British
Ringstand with 12 rings, 1985
Rings: 18K gold, emeralds, sapphires
Stand: nickel alloy, resin
Photo: Virginia Price

Myra Mimlitsch-Gray, b. 1962
American
Grisaille Ring, 1991
Grisaille enamel on copper, silver
Photo courtesy of the artist



Tone Vigeland, b. 1938
Norwegian
Ring, c. 1994
Silver
Photo: Virginia Price

For this exhibition, Drutt drew on her deep knowledge of the artists' oeuvres. The *Grisaille Ring*, made early in luminary **MYRA MIMLITSCH-GRAY**'s career, is an apt example. A clever take on value, Mimlitsch-Gray flattens the trope of the diamond ring into its grayscale equivalent, expertly rendered in trompe-l'oeil enamel.

Kiff Slemmons, b. 1944
American
Finger Puppet, 1998
Ebony, silver, pencils, erasers
Photo: Rod Slemmons

As in many of **TONE VIGELAND**'s pieces, this textile-like ring by the Norwegian trailblazer features hundreds of individual elements bound to the silver mesh. When worn, they float into the air like a tassel, tracing the wearer's movement. "It feels like silk," Drutt says.

In **KIFF SLEMMONS**'s double ring, fingers transform into the puppet's legs as arms of sharpened pencils—a signature material for the pioneering artist—animate the wearer's movement.

Depicting his ancestors' wartime sightline, *The Greatest Generation: Torpedo* includes a French coin brought back from World War II by **KENNETH DERENGOWSKI**'s grandfather and great uncle. The coin also serves as a subtle nod to trench art, as soldiers often crafted coins into rings during the war.

With deftly minimal forms and surface treatments, this ring is one of three pieces in *RINGS!* by the famed Japanese jeweler **YASUKI HIRAMATSU**, the first non-European awarded the Golden Ring of Honor in Hanau, Germany in 1994. Drutt was instrumental in honoring Hiramatsu's legacy at the Philadelphia Museum of Art following his death in 2012.

While rings are artistic expressions, they are also personal markers, commemorating life's most important events. When Drutt married H. Peter Stern (1928–2018) in 2007 after a friendship of twenty-three years, "everybody kept telling him to buy me a ruby." She demurred, he insisted, and the couple found themselves at Tiffany & Co. looking at larger and larger gems. "Then he turned around, looked at me and said, 'Helen, you're right. You know artists that can make a ring that's really unique.' That's when we called **GERD ROTHMANN**," Drutt recalls. A red film overlays Stern's picture in the locket, "so I had my ruby after all."

Kenneth Derengowski, b. 1974
American
The Greatest Generation: Torpedo, 2011
Silver, found object, slate
Photo: Virginia Price

Yasuki Hiramatsu, 1926–2012
Japanese
Ring, 2009
Silver
Photo: Virginia Price

Gerd Rothmann, b. 1941
German
Locket Engagement Ring, 2007
Gold, photograph of H. Peter Stern, acrylic
Photo: Virginia Price

Christer Jonsson, b. 1945
Swedish
Vanitas II, 2013
Patinated, partly gilt silver, niobium, cubic zirconia
Photo: Virginia Price

A kinetic wonder, Drutt selected *Vanitas II* by **CHRISTER JONSSON** for its "mechanical virtuosity," which is met by its equally shrewd symbolism. As the lever shifts, the mask rises to reveal a skull pointing its golden tongue, a reminder of life's transience and death's inevitability.

Venezuelan artist **SAMUEL GUILLÉN** makes his home in New York, but found himself in São Paulo, Brazil, for a year in 2012. Inspired by the lush organicism of its modernist architecture, his response was this ring, blending the graphic naturalism of porcupine quills with structural curves.

Samuel Guillén, b. 1977
Venezuelan (active US)
Ring, 2014
Sterling silver, South African porcupine quills
Photo: Virginia Price

Stacey Lee Webber, b. 1982 (ring)
American
Mark Wagner, b. 1976 (collage)
American
Groucho Marx Ring, 2019
Vintage silver quarters, brass, paper dollars, ink
Photo: Virginia Price

Debra Rapoport, b. 1945
American
Lichee Ring, 2021
Toilet paper roll, paint, strips of copper, twisted paper, pipe cleaner wrapped in paper, chips of dried paint, found metal washer, found metal bottle cap, dried lichee nut
Photo: Virginia Price

STACEY LEE WEBBER and **MARK WAGNER**'s collaborative cameo ring was made during the Trump administration. Laced with humorous critique, it merges the distinguished role of the American president with that of iconic pop-culture celebrity—Groucho Marx.

A style icon, artist **DEBRA RAPOPORT** exuberantly declares value in what others overlook. Making something remarkable from what is often considered nothing, her palette includes a toilet paper roll, chips of dried paint, and the ring's central gem: a dried lichee.

One of the most innovative rings comes from Kolkata, India, and was gifted to Drutt during her visit to the Sawansukha Institute of Gemology & Jewellery Design in 2019. The vision of jeweler **NIKI SAWANSUKHA**, it imbues grains of rice with the same precious care as a cut diamond.

Niki Sawansukha, b. 1982
Indian
Ring, 2019
Rice, yellow lentils, seeds including white sesame, wood
Photo: Virginia Price

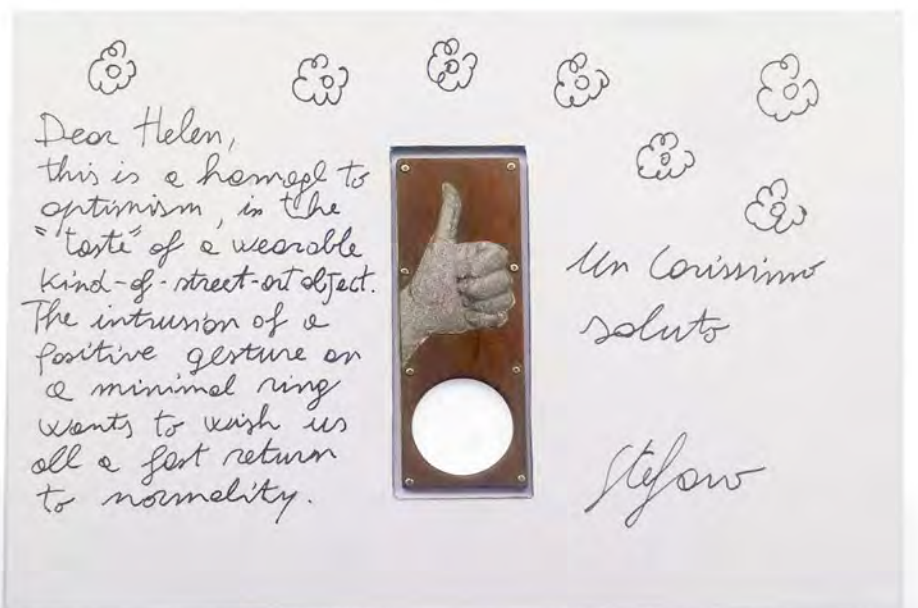
This ring of rings by **BERNHARD SCHOBINGER** has become one of Drutt's most popular jewelry ambassadors, often piquing interest in unexpected places. Case in point: when in line at the grocery store, a young man approached Drutt about this ring. Suddenly, she found herself sharing how the Swiss artist sourced it: scuba diving in Lake Zürich with a metal detector to forage for rings.

Bernhard Schobinger, b. 1946
Swiss
Kinetic Ring, 2019
Yellow and white gold
Photo courtesy of the artist

KARL FRITSCH has often said he "speaks through rings." *KF 524* speaks not just in words, but in conversations. Nearly a dozen rings are perilously crowded across its setting, so deep in discussion they threaten to tumble off one's finger.

Karl Fritsch, b. 1963
German (active New Zealand)
KF 524, 2019
Silver, citrine, emeralds, malachite, cubic zirconia
Photo courtesy of the artist

STEFANO MARCHETTI's "homage to optimism" is one of the most recent works in *RINGS!*. A fitting conclusion, it precisely marks the present day, offering a talisman of faith in the future against the Covid-19 pandemic.


Dear Helen,
this is a homage to optimism, in the "taste" of a wearable kind-of-street-art object. The intrusion of a positive gesture on a minimal ring wants to wish us all a fast return to normality.
Un Carissimo saluto
Stefano

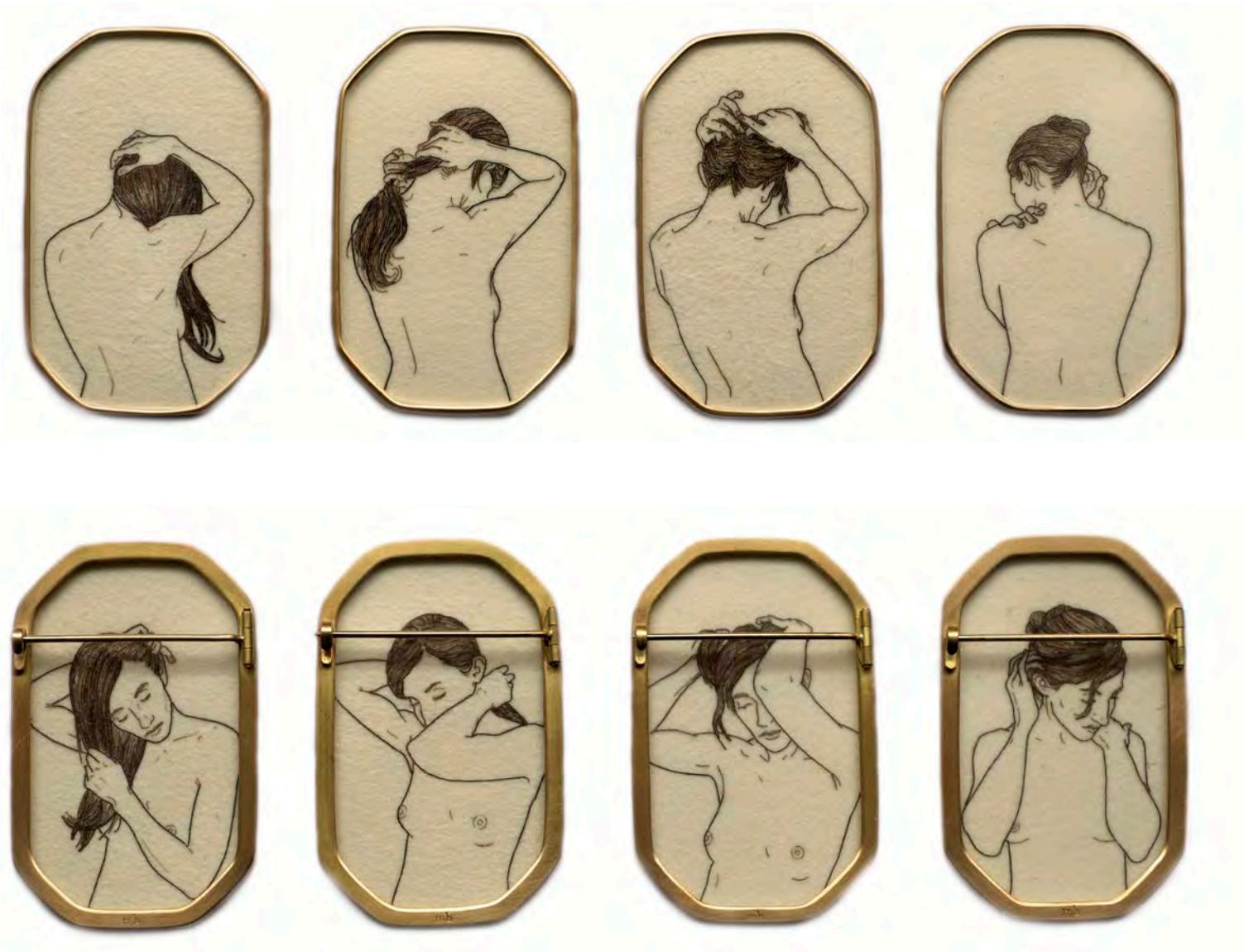
Stefano Marchetti, b. 1970
Italian
Ring, 2021
Silver, wood, paper
Photo courtesy of the artist

Elizabeth Essner is an independent curator and writer based in Brooklyn, New York.

SHARED INTIMACIES

Melanie's World

By Andrea DiNoto



Pinning (brooch series), 2013
Hair, paper, gold, mineral crystal
1⅜ x 1¼ x ¼ in.
Private collections
Photo courtesy of Sienna Patti

Previous spread:

Shaving (viewfinder), 2017
Hair on paper, mineral crystal,
mother of pearl, 18k gold,
silver with gold filled chain
2½ x 1⅜ x 1⅜ in.
Photo courtesy of Sienna Patti

BILENKER DOES INDEED SHED SOMETHING INTO EVERY IMAGE: HER OWN HAIR.

A young woman is pictured snuggled in a rumpled bed savoring a chocolate; kneeling in a T-shirt and underpants to scrub the bathtub; standing at the stove pouring herself a cup of tea; sitting half-dressed to pull on a sock. She's apparently at home, alone, just doing chores, relaxing, just ordinary stuff, yet we're compelled to look as if through a keyhole. Except that the keyhole is a frame for images that might be panels from a graphic novel, and each panel can be worn as pendant or brooch and is designed, ultimately, to be dispersed, worn, and preserved as a moment in time.

Welcome to the performative, existential, looking-glass world of artist-jeweler Melanie Bilenker, whose aim "is to conjure a sense of home for the viewer, the often forgotten private moments that make up normal life." With herself as subject, she invites us to participate in her private world, to "share intimacies," as she puts it, a paradoxical phrase central to the artist's commitment to depictions "of a person…revealed in privacy…a moment left behind… something shed." Bilenker does indeed shed something into every image: her own hair.

The lines of her delicate, sepia-toned "drawings" are in fact not drawn but hand-wrought using strands of her own auburn hair as the medium. She calls it "a reinvention of Victorian hair work," and it's a choice some might find shocking, possibly repellent. In Bilenker's artful hands, however, hair transmogrifies into a precious material, spun like silk from the body into a web of conspiring sensibilities. The medium, in essence, is the message: the artist is present, physically, as a work on paper. "An act of love" is how Bilenker describes her labor-intensive creative process, one that begins with a selfie and ends with evocative drawings, which she frames in precious metal as wearable art. Her avatar performs everyday actions intended to inspire calm in their familiarity; but often, in art as in life, memory and desire go hand in hand.

In these intensely private scenes—whether the subject is dressed, nude, or sporting rubber gloves—Bilenker's through-the-keyhole viewpoint can suggest a woman unaware of being watched. Intentionally or not, that woman sweetly eating a chocolate in bed gains allure purely by virtue of camera angle. In *Braiding* (2017), she relaxes nude, with ankles crossed and knees pulled up, braiding her hair in a pose expressive of Bilenker's comment: "I'm comfortable in myself." In this case she is comfortable enough to tuck herself away in a mother-of-pearl, silver, and gold viewfinder-pendant that hangs on a long chain to the navel so that the unsuspecting first-time viewer is treated to a surprise peep show. The viewfinder construct was inspired, Bilenker explains, by the plastic keychain viewfinders she has saved from family trips to the Catskills and Miami Beach, when she was a child. "They're treasures to me," she says, in that they still hold photographs of family life—"my mom in a bathing cap; someone at the table eating a potato." By extension, then, Bilenker's viewfinder shares a moment from her adult life, a nostalgic indulgence on the one hand, a moment of unselfconsciousness on the other, with a hint of playful voyeurism, as if to say, "this is me, literally."

However such views may be interpreted[1], the fact remains that though based technically on Victorian hairwork—at which she is expert—Bilenker's oeuvre renounces that era's repressive sense of propriety for a fully expressive sense of herself as both woman and subject. In addition, while the Victorians made and wore hair jewelry as love tokens and/or memento mori, honoring and displaying the human substance—often braided or woven—in decorative settings, in Bilenker's rendition, hair presents itself purely as line. In one sense, she admits, her refined technique intentionally mutes the "ick" factor some people attach to bodily materials in art. Hair, as a substance, Bilenker points out, exists in varying tones and thicknesses that can impart depth and texture, as the image requires: thick strands from the crown for outlining, thinner temple strands

Two examples of Victorian hair-work jewelry from Bilenker's personal collection.

Photo: Melanie Bilenker

Top:
Chocolate (brooch), 2008
Hair in resin, gold, ebony, pigment
3¾ x 2¾ x ⅜ in.
Courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art
Photo: K. Yanoviak

Dogwood (pendant) (detail), 2017
Hair, paper, gold, silver, mineral crystal, gold filled chain
3¼ x 2¾ x ⅛ in. pendant,
20 in. chain
Private collection
Photo courtesy of Sienna Patti

Right:
Dogwood (detail)

for detail work, and silver strands, she discovered, can represent the color of water. In *Rinsing,* from the *Viewfinder* series, Bilenker's own gray hairs replicate water raining down on a head of auburn hair—a surreal double take on the artist showering.

Starting in the early 2000s, Bilenker began to photograph herself using a Nikon DSLR, and a Polaroid with timer. "iPhone selfies are not what sparked my work, " she says, "but since 2016 the phone has been a useful tool." She takes multiple carefully posed reference shots, some with the camera taped to the ceiling or mounted on a tripod. Images are then plotted on a grid and composed into a preliminary pencil drawing. The drawing guides the transfer of hair onto a vellum-like paper whose tint, texture and barely evident markings contribute a subtle ground for the laying on and gluing down of hair. (She has abandoned resin as an adhesive, used in earlier pieces.) The process, for which she uses proprietary bookbinder's materials, is partially captured in a mesmerizing short video, produced for the 2019 Smithsonian Museum of American Art's *40 UNDER 40* exhibition, in which Bilenker demonstrates her technique, applying hair to paper with the skill of a sleight-of-hand artist. Solid strands are used for long straight lines, but curved lines are necessarily constructed bit by bit, so that under magnification, they appear as somewhat coarse dotted lines, resembling stitching. To the naked eye, pieced lines take on uncanny illusions of solid line, just as her mundane poses "suggest," paradoxically, the illusion of privacy. The completed hairwork drawing is then mounted on a metal backing and matted under a protective mineral-crystal, i.e. watchmaker's lens, practically and metaphorically protecting and preserving a Proustian moment in time, which is what Bilenker truly aims for.

Bilenker dates her interest in jewelry to her high-school days in Fine Arts Club, where the basics of problem solving and image-building began to meld with concepts of memory and musings on her mother's pearls. Her exclusive commitment to hair as a medium began to evolve while studying craft, jewelry, and metals at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, where, in 2000, she earned a BFA, under the tutelage of Sharon Church, now professor emeritus. As Bilenker recalls, Church often spoke of "honoring the prior life of materials," whether it be wood, bone, hair, or antler. For one class, Bilenker relates, "a friend gave me a buzz cut, and I kept all of that hair and made a collar of steel cable with tufts of hair coming off the ends." She embraced Church's encouragement to draw as a preliminary step in metalwork, and loved drawing, but never considered herself a particularly gifted draughtsman. Post-graduation, Bilenker became interested in the work of contemporary photographers, including Cindy Sherman, Sophie Calle, and Larry Sultan, whose consciously staged images deal with identity and intimacy.

The counterintuitive notion of using hair as a graphic medium presented itself to Bilenker when she chanced upon a catalogue for the 1993 exhibition *Hair*, at the John M. Kohler Art Center. Included was a conceptual artwork by Tom Friedman, *Untitled* (1990), in which he'd arranged his pubic hair in a precise spiral on a bar of partially used white soap.[2] "Oh my god," was Bilenker's response, "drawing with hair!" In an interview published in *Wallpaper,* she recounted: "I was struck by the contrast between the humble familiarity of materials alongside the reverence marked in hours spent making a perfect spiral."[3] (More recently, in a 2021 *Vogue* profile, she admitted, "I kind of loved the irreverence of it.")[4] Around the same time, a friend gave her the exhibition catalogue *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*,[5] which included a simple circular locket mourning the death in 1801 of two young sons of a prominent New York Jewish family. On the locket's front, strands of each child's hair, blond and brown, are used to picture two willow

Washing Day (stereoscope), 2018
Hair on paper, brass, glass, antique stereoscope
3¾ x 7⅛ in.
Photo courtesy of Sienna Patti

"I SAW HOW THE EMOTIONAL RESONANCE OF HAIR WITHIN THE PORTRAIT-MINIATURE SCALE COULD WORK CONCEPTUALLY AS JEWELRY AS PROOF OF EXISTENCE, A SOUVENIR."

trees, symbolic of mourning. At that point, says Bilenker, "I saw how the emotional resonance of hair within the portrait-miniature scale could work conceptually as jewelry as proof of existence, a souvenir."

If Bilenker remains quasi-anonymous in her drawings, it's because these works are not intended as portraits per se. In traditional eighteenth-century miniatures, invariably watercolor paintings on ivory, an exquisitely limned visage engages the viewer directly, but Bilenker's choice to do the opposite can be interpreted as emotional detachment. The artist would counter that "the emotional aspect of my work is the material of the person," her own person, as it is, and powerful in its implication. In 2017, for her *Mother* exhibition at Sienna Patti Contemporary in Lenox, Massachusetts, Bilenker stepped away briefly from the selfie mode to create a unique series of deeply personalized "portrait" pendants made with her own hair but representing her immediate family by various flora held in her extended hand: dogwood for her father; magnolia for her husband; for her children, forget-me-not and snapdragon; eucalyptus for her mother. "I suppose it may seem odd to put this work in a gallery for sale," she reflects, "but since they are not direct representations, I see this as not dissimilar from the perceived oddity of putting my own hair and image in a gallery for sale. In all modes of my work," she continues, "I desire connection with the viewer on a level both personal and relatable, whether it is rooted in my life or my inextricable familial bonds."

In her close embrace of the domestic scene, Bilenker at times reaches beyond jewelry, employing hairwork in the creation of larger-scale, one-of-a-kind objects that have been included in a wide variety of museum and gallery exhibitions. In *Forging a Link* at the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, she was one of twenty-two artists invited, in 2018, to respond to the collection of pre-industrial tools, artifacts, and vintage stereocards. (Stereocards, or stereographs, are double-image photographic prints that appear to be 3D when viewed through a stereoscope.) Bilenker created *Washing Day*, an engaging, beautifully rendered hairwork stereocard in which she sits folding laundry, a universal image of domesticity.

Often made of paper in an accordion fold-out form, Victorian tunnel books presented a receding view of a scene within a storybook format; Bilenker's modern version, *A ROOM*, employs four wood-framed,[6] hair-on-paper-on-glass panels set in a box to create a perspective view of herself seated at a desk, with legs crossed and bare feet. She created this site-specific installation for the 2018 exhibition *Victoriana Reimagined* at the Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion House museum in Philadelphia.

Bilenker's *Sleeping*, *Washing*, *Brushing* (2014–2017), a series of three wall-mounted light boxes, has been exhibited at Sienna Patti Contemporary in conjunction with her solo jewelry exhibitions there. Equipped with motion-sensor LED lights, the boxes appear to be antique mirrors until the viewer looks into a coin-sized unmirrored peep hole to view the illuminated hairwork on paper. *Brushing* is Bilenker's homage to Impressionist Mary Cassatt with whom she shares a dedication to the domestic genre. In Cassatt's iconic 1890–91 color print, *Woman Bathing*, a partially draped woman stands at a dry sink, a striped robe tied around her waist; but Bilenker's near replica replaces Cassatt's woman with herself, clad only in underpants, while leaning over a modern sink to brush her teeth. Bilenker reproduces Cassatt's mise-en-scène down to the patterned wallpaper and a glimpse of her own reddish hair "reflected" in the mirror. Not incidentally, the image conveys the Japonism[7] of

Trim (brooch), 2020
Hair on paper, silver, stainless steel, mineral crystal
1⅜ x 2¼ x ⅜ in.
Private collection
Photo courtesy of Sienna Patti

A Room (tunnel book), 2018
Hair on paper, brass, glass, wood
15½ x 9⅛ x 6½ in.
Photo courtesy of Sienna Patti

Sunday Afternoon (brooch), 2020
Hair on paper, silver, mineral crystal, stainless steel
2 x 2¾ x ¼ in.
Photo courtesy of Sienna Patti

Cassatt's work, with its emphasis on expressive line, negative space, and concepts of privacy, all essential elements of Bilenker's own oeuvre.

In rare instances—except for commissions—Bilenker may use the hair of others. For *Absence*, Sophie Calle's conceptual installation in memory of her mother, presented in 2013 at the Paula Cooper Gallery, Bilenker was invited to contribute a hairwork: the single word "*Souci*," which was part of a phrase spoken by Calle's mother as she lay dying: "*Ne vous faites pas de souci*," or "Don't worry."

Bilenker's jewelry has been exhibited nationally and internationally and acquired by numerous major public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Museum of Arts and Design, and the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. In 2010, she was the recipient of a Pew Fellowship in the Arts for work that "translates the historic art of Victorian hair jewelry into work that reflects upon the contemporary era." Ulysses Grant Dietz, curator emeritus of the Newark Museum,[8] observed that Bilenker "has created a modern riff on [Victorian hairwork] that is both uniquely her own and uniquely of the moment… fully embracing of the complex cultural history swirling around it." In 2020, in response to the Covid-19 lockdown, Bilenker made two brooches expressive of our universally shared moment of isolation.[9] *Trim* pictures her stealing time to trim her bangs, as if looking in a mirror. *Sunday Afternoon* presents a sleeping woman, loosely wrapped in a small patterned blanket. Turn the brooch over, and there is a reverse view, the blanket partially fallen away to reveal her naked, resting body. Both poignant and sensual, this enigmatic drawing demonstrates Bilenker's uncanny ability to endow a mundane scene with perplexing nuance—here escape and refuge; withdrawal and presence.

Andrea DiNoto writes on art, craft, and design.

1 In an essay written for Bilenker's 2017 exhibition, *Mother*, at Sienna Patti Contemporary, Bruce Metcalf comments on the works' "ambiguous intimacy," stating "one starts with an impression of cozy familiarity, but ends up with a conundrum." / **2** Sold at auction in 2001 for $58,750. / **3** https://www.wallpaper.com/watches-and-jewellery/melanie-bilenker-hair-jewellery. / **4** Lilah Ramzi, "This Artist Crafts Victoriana Miniatures Out of Her Own Hair," *Vogue*, January 10, 2021, https://www.vogue.com/article/victoriana-hair-art-exhibition. / **5** Presented at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn. Catalogue by Robin Jaffee Frank, Yale University Press, 2000. / **6** Friend and artist Scott Kip contributing the fine woodworking. / **7** Cassatt's copper plate prints reveal a kinship with the famed woodblock prints of Kitagawa Utamaro, known for portrayals of beautiful women in intimate settings. / **8** Deitz acquired Bilenker's *Itch* brooch in 2010 for the museum. / **9** Both pieces were included in *HomeWork*, Bilenker's fifth solo show for Sienna Patti Contemporary, January 8 to February 28, 2021.

Conferences & Events

Radiant Pavilion: Melbourne Contemporary Jewellery and Object Biennial
9.4.21 – 9.12.21
Melbourne, Australia

Radiant Pavilion is a celebration of the many aspects of contemporary jewelry and object practice in Melbourne and around the world. Drawing from the strong community surrounding contemporary jewelry and objects in Melbourne, Radiant Pavilion has taken shape over the past five years and encompasses events from national and international artists.

radiantpavilion.com.au
@radiantpavilion

Indian Ocean Craft Triennial (IOTA21)—Futuring Craft
9.17.21 – 9.19.21
Curtin University, Perth, Australia

The Futuring Craft conference maps contemporary crafts and defines the scope of craft making in the Indian Ocean region. The dynamic exchange of knowledge and ideas critically analyzes and challenges notions that crafts are embedded in the past and address the concept of, 'Craft…as elemental to a future economy and culture.'

indianoceancrafttriennial.com
@crafttriennial

NYCJW (New York City Jewelry Week)
11.15.21 – 11.21.21
New York, NY

NYC Jewelry Week is a cultural platform dedicated to the celebration of jewelry. We are a hybrid hub, delivering jewelry culture directly to our audience through content, events, strategic initiatives, and an annual jewelry week, in support of our mission—jewelry for all.

nycjewelryweek.com
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Exhibitions

Suited Up: Contemporary Armor Making in Texas
6.5.21 – 9.11.21
Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston Texas

The exhibition, featuring suits of armor inspired by historical re-enactments and iconic pop-culture warriors, explores the extraordinary craftsmanship behind armor making in the Lone Star State.

crafthouston.org/exhibition/suited-up-contemporary-armor-making-in-texas/
@crafthouston

Divine Legacies in Black Jewelry
7.5.21 – 9.12.21
Metal Museum, Memphis, TN

Coupling physical objects with public archives ephemera, this exhibition curated by LaMar R. Gayles Jr., contextualizes the history of modern Black American jewelry production during the 20th and 21st centuries and expands understanding of Black jewelers and their work. It is the first exhibition of its kind to debut at a Southern museum.

metalmuseum.org/divine-legacies
@metalmuseum

Coreen Simpson
The Black Cameo, 1990
Jet, brass, enamel
1¾ x 1½ in.
Artwork courtesy of LaMar R. Gayles, Jr.
Photo: Houston Cofield

Get a Bead on: Jewelry and Small Objects
7.21.21 – 1.22.22
Racine Art Museum

This exhibition, comprised of works from RAM's collection, reveals the expansive potential of beads for structure as well as decoration in contemporary art jewelry and small-scale objects.

ramart.org/exhibit/get-a-bead-on
@racineartmuseum

Joyce J. Scott
Topographical Fields (neckpiece), 1989
Glass beads, thread, wire
11½ x 9½ x 2 in.
Racine Art Museum, Gift of Laura Oskowitz

Michael Logan Woodle
Low on the Hog: Gravy Boat, 2014
Sterling silver, copper
5 x 9 x 5 in.
Photo courtesy of the artist

Vicki Mason
Garland for Azizeh, 2017
Bamboo, powder coated brass, cotton, silk, various base metals
36 x 36 x 5½ cm
Photo: Andrew Barcham

Tributaries: Tiff Massey | Everyday Arsenal

7.25.21 – 9.24.21
Metal Museum, Memphis, TN

Interdisciplinary artist Tiff Massey creates work inspired by African standards of economic vitality, including both large-scale and wearable sculptures, music and performance. In this solo exhibition, Massey draws on contemporary observances of class and race through the lens of an African diaspora to create a site-specific installation at the Metal Museum.

metalmuseum.org/trib-tiff-massey
@metalmuseum

Food Justice: Growing a Healthier Community through Art

9.10.21 – 3.19.22
Contemporary Craft, Pittsburgh, PA

Food Justice: Growing a Healthier Community through Art will critically explore complex human issues that can shape and influence positive change in food security. Because of the visionary, poetic, and transformative potential of art, you will see, feel, and understand the issues of food insecurity in new and meaningful ways and be moved to become part of the solution.

exploremindfulart.com/
@SCCpgh

Island Welcome

9.17.21 – 9.19.21
Futuring Craft Conference, Perth, Australia

Island Welcome is a touring group exhibition exploring contemporary jewelry as a gesture of welcome. Curated by Belinda Newick, this exhibition interprets the theme of welcome to bring attention to asylum seekers issues whilst considering Australian immigration policies.

indianoceancrafttriennial.com/conference
@crafttriennial

Installation view of Tiff Massey's exhibition, *Everyday Arsenal*, at the Metal Museum.

Photo: Kim Ward

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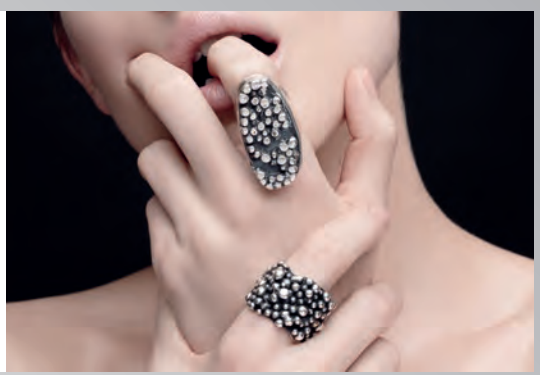

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